

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECCE) IN MALAYSIA: THE TALENT GAP

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ABSTRACT

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is essential for children's growth and development. International organizations, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the OECD, emphasize the importance of providing high-quality ECCE. This aligns with Sustainable Development Goal Target 4, which aims to ensure that all children, regardless of gender, have access to quality early childhood care and education. When assessing the quality of ECCE, two key factors must be considered: structural quality and process quality. Structural quality includes physical elements such as the facilities, classroom setup, child-to-adult ratio, teacher qualifications, and curriculum. Teacher qualifications are particularly crucial because they directly impact the learning environment and the overall effectiveness of early childhood education. In Malaysia, the government recognizes the importance of teacher professionalism in ECCE and has mandated that all preschool teachers hold at least a Diploma in Early Childhood Education by 2020. However, many ECCE workers still lack the necessary qualifications. This study investigates teacher qualifications and professionalism issues in various ECCE settings, specifically childcare centers and preschools. It employs a qualitative approach, including focus group discussions with private ECCE centers in Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, and Kuala Lumpur. The findings reveal contrasting perspectives on the roles of teachers in these two settings: preschool teachers are generally viewed as educators requiring specialized training, while childcare workers are often perceived as caretakers. This perception gap affects the quality of ECCE, as better-qualified teachers are more likely to provide high-quality education and care. The study highlights the relationship between teacher qualifications and ECCE quality, contributing to policy recommendations to raise professional standards in the field. Additionally, this research aligns with Malaysia's Twelfth Malaysia Plan, which focuses on improving children's well-being.

Keywords: ECCE, Childcare, Preschool, Governance, Quality Education.